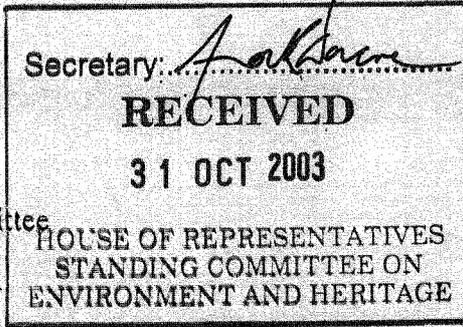


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Environment & Heritage Committee
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



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Dear Sir/Madam,

SUBMISSION NO. 51

A Submission to the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities – 2025

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage is conducting an inquiry into issues and policies that relate to the development of sustainable cities to the year 2025.

The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are:

- "The environmental and social impacts of sprawling urban development;
- The major determinants of urban settlement patterns and desirable patterns of development for the growth of Australian cities;
- A "blueprint for ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement, with particular reference to eco-efficiency and equity in the provision of services and infrastructure;
- Measures to reduce the environmental, social and economic costs of continuing urban expansion; and
- Mechanisms for the Commonwealth to bring about urban development reform and promote ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement."

Introduction

Established in 1954 the Hickinbotham Group is a major home builder and land development company in South Australia. These activities are integrated with commercial building, shopping centre management, real estate and finance. The Group has broken ground in innovative water management projects including the design and construction of a local effluent drainage plant for Renmark Council and an aquifer recharge project within the Andrews Farm housing development (Andrews Farm is an area on the northern fringe of Adelaide within the Playford Council area). The Hickinbotham Group opened a Brisbane office in 1979 where the successful formula of integrated land development and home building was repeated.

The Hickinbotham Group having housed 30,000 people over four decades and developed more than 50 community estates has had an important influence in South Australian and Australian housing.

It is emphasized that to provide a new area of a city that is suitable for the 2003 discerning home buyer a number of fundamental steps must be undertaken:

- Land, that is strategically placed, must be acquired often many years before houses are built and held by the developer until the market is ready for the new housing. South Australia has a

Government held land bank but release of this land is restricted and because of significant demand is expensive for an affordable housing product. The current Government land bank is likely to be depleted within the next ten to fifteen years.

The land that is acquired by the developer must be suitably zoned for housing and if it is not residentially zoned on acquisition it must be subjected to Development Plan reviews and a lengthy time period for the zoning change (often up to 3 years). There is a significant risk in this process that the land may not be re-zoned.

The Hickinbotham Group will not develop any new area without considerable planning in relation to road layout, traffic management, electricity and water reticulation, stormwater management (including re-use), major new landscaping and recreation areas, preservation of areas of sensitivity, local shopping, education facilities and other community assets. The Hickinbotham Group emphasis has been to build a community from scratch and to maintain that community's viability and sustainability.

The Hickinbotham Group has been involved in innovative financing arrangements with its new home buyers and there has been a major emphasis on assisting the first entry buyer to purchase an affordable product and to continue to own that product in the tough early times of buying a home, developing a career and establishing a family. Hickinbotham has many examples of allowing the Australian dream to become reality.

When developing land from green fields to communities the emphasis is on the long-haul and Hickinbotham has been involved in major developments such as Andrews Farm, Foxfield (Athelstone), Manor Farm (Salisbury East), Woodend (Sheidow Park) and Windermere that can take up to twenty five years to mature. Thus there is a commitment to the sustainability of the community that is being created.

When a community is fully developed and the construction phase ends there will still be a connection with that community particularly in relation to the next generation of home buyers and Hickinbotham's reputation has been such as to provide housing for the sons and daughters of its first-home buyers.

I. The Environmental and social impacts of sprawling urban development

Urban sprawl has become an emotive term in city development with connotations of inefficiency, waste and dysfunction. Australia's major cities are low density entities built around the detached house on its own piece of land and the significant use of the motor vehicle. Sprawl is seen as threatening to productive farm land on the fringes of cities and areas of biodiversity.

It is essential that the Inquiry has a more objective view of the concept of sprawl and the reality that many of the new communities that are being created within Australian cities are not producing areas of dysfunction or environmental degradation. Rather it is possible to create larger cities or regional centres that provide effective, energy conscious and affordable housing close to work places that sustain local environments and allow commuters to journey to work in travel modes that are green-house gas efficient. Sprawl does not necessarily mean environmental and social degradation just the same as increasing residential densities with the threat of overcrowding and traffic generation also does not mean degradation. It comes down to the effective planning and integration of our cities.

1.1 Environmental Objectives

The Hickinbotham Group has created pleasant housing within sustainable urban landscapes. The housing styles are energy efficient and the Group has an interest in energy sustainable housing.

One of the major contributions that Hickinbotham has made within its housing estates is to deal with water management in a sustainable way. The Group has been at the forefront of water reclamation innovation in Australia. As far back as the 1960's it implemented environmentally sensitive treatments within the Foxfield estate at Athelstone by creating drainage systems in swales. The Group has presented plans for a 30 home innovative village at Andrews Farm which would treat waste water locally and then reuse it for ornamental ponds, to irrigate gardens, wash cars, flush toilets and for other sensible, water conservation practices.

In 1992 the Group in conjunction with the Department of Mines and Energy and CSIRO encouraged the then Munno Para Council and the State Planning Authority to adopt a scheme at Andrews Farm to store storm water run-off in the underground aquifer.

The Group financed the drilling of the pilot injection well which paved the way for the successful artificial recharge of the Andrews Farm aquifer with storm water. The ability of the aquifer to accept, store and release stormwater has been better than anticipated. The system is now operational and together with a wetland is a working example of a comprehensive approach to water reclamation and the irrigation of useful recreation space for St Columba School and surrounds. Other good examples of the Group's endeavours in water management can be seen at Windermere Estate, Salisbury North.

The scheme is a benchmark project and has been the focus of world wide interest with international hydrologists visiting the site during a conference in 1994. The Group maintains a close association with the CSIRO and the Australian Water Conservation and Reuse Program and has plans for further innovative water projects in new developments in the Outer Metropolitan Area where environmental sensitivities are paramount.

The Group has a strong track record in all of its developments in regard to sensitive management of vegetation and has replanted large areas of native trees and worked hard to keep existing flora intact.

1.2 Social Objectives

With its fundamental aim to create communities the Hickinbotham Group has been firmly involved in the provision of essential services to its new communities. It is emphasised that the Hickinbotham Group has built extensively for the new home buyer (the first home entrant market). This is a group of battlers who deserve their shot at the Australian dream.

The Hickinbotham Group recognises the areas of community support in the new housing estate can concern schools, shops and other essential facilities. In an Australian first Hickinbotham pioneered the privatised ownership of educational infrastructure when it built a school in 1995 at Woodend estate and leased it back to the State Government. The concept of essential local education provision went further with the creation of an inter-denominational school at Andrews Farm. St Columba was a direct result of the

Hickinbotham Group's tenacity in providing an essential facility at a time when the State Government was unwilling to do so. To achieve this project the Hickinbotham Group had to provide a substantial subsidy, including the endowment of land and construction of the first stage.

The School is now a significant success as an R to Year 12 School and is becoming one of the largest private schools in the northern area and the State. This is an even more pronounced achievement when it is realised that the Andrews Farm area is adjacent to the Peachey Belt which is one of the most socially deprived areas in Australia. The School not only provides an opportunity for Andrews Farm residents but has a substantial intake from students who live in the Peachey Belt.

New suburbs can have difficulties with new services and it is often the case that the estate must be completed before local shops become viable. There is a conscious effort by the Hickinbotham Group to ensure that shopping areas are integrated into the new development as soon as possible and the Group has been involved in designing, building and managing shopping centres in its major estates. In some cases the management of local shops has been head hunted to ensure the set up is viable and provides the necessary services.

2. **The major determinants of urban settlement patterns and desirable patterns of development for the growth of Australian Cities**

Some Governments, including South Australia, have reacted to the threat of sprawl by imposing Urban Growth Boundaries, zoning restrictions and reviews of opportunities for infill and regeneration/consolidation activities.

The reality of these actions without adequate review is:

- to create a major risk for the continued provision of an affordable housing product by the private sector; and
- the difficulty of providing adequate available land that is capable of being purchased within existing suburbs.

A major determinant for urban settlement is not only available land but the provision of suitable urban infrastructure, (Roads, water, energy, stormwater, sewer and community/health services). The last twenty years has seen a growing trend by Government away from the direct provision of infrastructure services and, particularly with outsourcing of infrastructure components, the removal of public borrowing to the individual buying the land and therefore the increase in mortgage commitment. Post World War II Australia saw the heavy involvement of public infrastructure and borrowing by government agencies. This no longer occurs and many costs are passed on to the first home buyer and are not spread over the full life of the asset that is being created.

The decline of the influence of a public housing sector and the concentration on welfare housing, often in a crisis mode, has closed the door on the opportunity for those less well off in our community to use public housing as a means to achieve private housing for their family over the longer term.

It is argued that Government has given up its responsibility to provide infrastructure and to borrow for the life of the asset. Added to this are policies to restrict green-fields land through government land banking, restrictive zoning and growth boundaries. It is considered that State Government should provide (or encourage) key infrastructure through their Development Programmes, in identified areas around major cities and within growth regions. There is no proactive policy that undertakes this task and it is argued that urban development, on sustainable principles, should be able to be located in many areas provided infrastructure is provided.

3. **A "blueprint" for ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement, with particular reference to eco efficiency and equity in the provision of services and infrastructure**

Measures to reduce the environmental, social and economic costs of continuing urban expansion; and

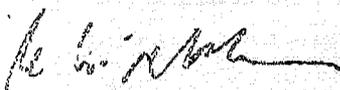
Mechanisms for the Commonwealth to bring about urban development reform and promote ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement."

The Northern Adelaide Plains was seen by the Hickinbotham Group as a major area of opportunity for housing development if only a comprehensive, sustainable alternative to urban sprawl could be found. It was therefore the case that in the 1980's an idea was put forward to make Andrews Farm a pivot for series of villages each with a population of 3,000 to 5,000 people living in high quality energy efficient and water sustainable neighbourhoods with each village separated by a green belt that could also be a rural productive and employment generating area. Whilst this idea was comprehensively promoted with Government and its agencies it was not accepted. It is still seen as a viable alternative to urban sprawl and could be utilised in parts of Adelaide's outer metropolitan area and near other major Australian cities and regional centres.

Importantly the Commonwealth Government needs a strong regional development policy particularly as there is now real and sustainable growth in many regional areas. The housing requirements for these areas have the opportunity to be built around sustainable social and community services, employment opportunities that are an integral part of the new housing, water management concepts and vegetation preservation and revegetation.

The Hickinbotham Group commends the foresight of the Minister for Environment and Heritage in undertaking this Inquiry and wishes to impress on both the Minister and the Standing Committee the importance of carrying through any findings into very real policy changes. The importance of these issues to Australian Cities cannot be underestimated and it is essential that the ideas, creativity of the private sector be included in any future changes.

Yours faithfully,
Hickinbotham Group



MICHAEL HICKINBOTHAM
Managing Director